

UNIVERSITY
OF MICHIGAN

OCT 22 1956

THE

LIBRARY SCIENCE
LIBRARY

ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

FORMERLY "THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT"
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE A.A.L.

Talking Points	153
Talking about Reading—Andre Malraux	155
Success Story	158
Display School	159
A.A.L. Election	159
(Sub)sistence to Readers	160
Hooting and Honking	162
Librarians into Film Stars	164
Your Letters	166

VOLUME 49

• •

1956

• •

NUMBER 10

OCTOBER

CEDRIC CHIVERS LTD.

PORTWAY, BATH

BOOKBINDERS

—AND—

BOOKSELLERS

TELEGRAMS
"DUROFLEX," BATH

TELEPHONE
7355, BATH



THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians

(Section of the Library Association)

Edited by W. G. SMITH, Finsbury Public Libraries

VOL. 49. NO. 10.

OCTOBER, 1956

Talking Points

Display is one of the most neglected techniques in the library, yet one of the most important. In an attempt to remedy this, the A.A.L. has organised a week-end school on practical display work to be held at the end of this month (see the advertisement on page 159). This is not a school for artists, but for the assistant librarian wishing to brighten up his or her library and promote a wider use of books.

Younger assistants have a chance to serve their colleagues and gain a great deal of useful experience by standing for election on the A.A.L. Council. For the first time, three places are reserved for candidates under 30 years old. It is not necessary to wait until examinations are over before taking an active part in professional work. Many librarians, including your Editor, have found that experience of A.A.L. Committee work and the frequent opportunities arising for exchanging ideas with other librarians helped immensely in getting through the examinations. Do not be deterred by the possibility of having to compete at the poll with better-known people. Looking through some old copies of the *Assistant*, we found a time when even W. Howard Phillips was at the bottom of the poll!

Our members in the Divisions are constantly engaged in the hard work of preparing and publishing union lists of textbooks, library periodicals, reference books, bibliographies and other items valuable to students. The latest is a Union List of Library Periodicals produced by the small Division of South Wales and Monmouthshire. Comparison with the recommended minimum list of periodicals issued by the A.A.L. last month shows that, of the public libraries, even Cardiff takes only seven of the thirteen periodicals which should be in all libraries serving a population of 75,000 or more. Students are badly handicapped if they cannot get easy access to library journals, and we hope that all Divisions are approaching the authorities in an effort to improve the present position.


The dispute about the smaller municipal libraries has spread to the pages of the *Manchester Guardian*. Its Leader on 20th July praised a new publication by the Reference and Special Libraries Group in the North West, *The Libraries of Greater Manchester** as "a remarkable piece of work which brings out for the first time the great richness of the area in collections of books and technical information." It goes on to applaud the various schemes of co-operation and subject specialisation, praises the "patchy but sometimes surprisingly excellent municipal libraries," but records a "falling off in the efficiency of the smaller municipal libraries in recent years." This inevitably brought a stormy protest from young lion Daniel Hay of Whitehaven and from the "Acting Hon. Secretary of the Smaller Libraries Group." Once more

we are told, as if it is a startling revelation, that some large libraries are inefficient. Indeed, point to this is given by the *Manchester Guardian* itself which refers to the poor service in Cheshire County compared with the Derbyshire and Lancashire County Libraries. Nevertheless, the larger libraries are capable of improvement whereas there is only very limited scope to improve the very small ones. What, for example, has Mr. Hay to say of Knutsford which, according to this new publication, has an independent library for a population of 6,300 with an unqualified librarian who is not even a member of the L.A., and a staff of 1? The book-fund is £310.

We like Mr. Mumford's rejoinder to Mr. Hay in the *Manchester Guardian*. He says that he does not know if there has, in fact, been a fall in the efficiency of smaller libraries recently, but "for many of them the scope for descent is narrowly limited."

**Available at 15s. 0d. from G. E. Haslam, Manchester Central Library.*

KEESING'S

 25 YEARS' SERVICE
TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Progress Report No. 5

KEESING'S is available in 53 out of the 69 Libraries in towns having a population of 30-40,000 in the British Isles, of which ten subscriptions are placed by County Authorities.

CRAMER'S

for MUSIC

MUSICAL LITERATURE
AND MUSIC BINDING

**139, New Bond Street
London, W.1**

★ Special Music Enquiry Bureau

WOODFIELD & STANLEY

LIMITED

SPECIALISTS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BROOKFIELD MILLS, KIRKBURTON, HUDDERSFIELD

AND

THE CHILDREN'S BOOKSHOP

64, GREAT RUSSELL STREET, LONDON, W.C.1.

André Malraux

by A. C. BUBB, National Central Library

André Malraux was once asked what sort of training he, as a prominent supporter of General De Gaulle, thought should be given to the younger members of the General's party. He is said to have replied: "Books—and parachute jumping." The implied combination of learning and action, of intelligence and courage, is typical of Malraux; he has always combined the intellectual and the man of action and his reputation inside and outside France has been made by both his literary and political activities—in what proportions it is difficult to say.

There is something of a Malraux legend, especially about his earlier years (he is still only 55). No-one seems quite certain about the importance of his revolutionary activities in the Far East in the twenties, or just how far he lived through the events of several of his novels. It doesn't matter, for as a novelist, and a great and fascinating one, he was entitled to use whatever material suited his purpose.

His Eastern experiences do, however, seem to have precipitated his first considerable novel, *Les Conquérants* of 1928 (translated as *The Conquerors*). It is a study of revolution in Canton, and of Garine, a man to whom revolutionary activity has become almost a way of life and who finds that there is no place for him when plotting and organizing are no longer needed. The political overtones brought Malraux the distinction of a criticism from Trotsky, to which Malraux was able to reply that the correctness of his politics was irrelevant; he was treating a basically tragic subject, that of a man in an intolerable situation which he has himself created.

A variant of this theme appears in the next novel, *La Voie Royale* (1930, translated as *The Royal Way*), to produce a recurrent Malraux situation; that of a man, cut off from his fellows spiritually, if not physically, who achieves victory by asserting himself as a man, even though he is unsuccessful on the material plane. In the novel *Perken*, searching for archaeological remains in Indo China, as Malraux had done, asserts himself obstinately, even frenziedly, in the face of all kinds of difficulty. This book, like the previous one, is written in a sharp, nervous style characteristic of the author, although in later novels it grows broader and calmer. The lack of transitions, analogous to quick cutting in a film, shows to admirable effect in Malraux's next novel, one of his greatest achievements.

This is *La Condition Humaine* of 1933 (translated as *Storm in Shanghai*, or *Man's Estate*). This book established Malraux's reputation by showing how he could treat a great subject against a contemporary background. It is a tightly-organized account of a revolutionary attempt in Shanghai, of its failure on the withdrawal of party support and of the affairs of the characters affected by it. The presentation of the story is masterly, but politically the novel is ambiguous, for Malraux was going deeper than party lines and discussing how far party discipline is justified, what causes are worth the sacrifice of a man's peace of mind, or even of his life, and what a man is to do when confronted with his fate, which is to die, and which he must face alone. There is, as in all Malraux's books, something of the excitement of an adventure story; there is also a profound sense of human dignity.

In those years when the relations between art and propaganda occupied many writers' interests, and Day Lewis was addressing "the wielders

of power and welders of a new world," Malraux became a recognized voice of the European Left and published in 1935 his most propagandist novel: *Le Temps du Mépris* (translated as *Days of Contempt*). It is a simple story: a Communist is imprisoned by the Nazis, is released when someone gives himself up to save him and flies to Czechoslovakia to rejoin his wife. Yet the moral emerging is less a political lesson than a plea for brotherhood in man's struggle against evil which, it is implied, will still go on.

A French Hemingway ?

In the Spanish War Malraux joined the Republican Air Force and, using some of his own experiences, wrote *L'Espoir* (1937, translated as *Days of Hope*). It follows the course of the war up to the Republican victory at Teruel, again looking behind political action at, for example, Hernandez, who, believing that a war for a better world cannot be fought dishonourably, is not ruthless enough for the political bosses. One of the most memorable scenes is that of the rescue of some crashed airmen by peasants, moved not by political sympathy, but by human kindness; "Fraternity," says one character, "is the opposite of humiliation." In this book, as elsewhere, Malraux recalls Hemingway. *L'Espoir* is looser in build than *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, but more concerned with the issues involved in the war. The Frenchman is more intelligent and less self-consciously hairy-chested.

In 1939 Malraux enlisted in the French Army, was made prisoner and escaped to become eventually a Resistance Leader. He wrote then *La Lutte avec L'Ange*, of which some was destroyed by the Gestapo and some published in Switzerland. This part, called *Les Noyers de L'Altenbourg* (*The Walnut-trees of Altenburg*), is the last novel from Malraux, if indeed it can be called a novel; its five sections have a sort of circular form and a unifying theme: man's fate again, seen from a historical viewpoint.

The first section sees the narrator, Berger (Malraux's name in the Resistance), in a P.O.W. Camp at Chartres, the second describes the activities of the narrator's father as adventurer and German agent many years before; he is reminiscent of other Malraux heroes and of T. E. Lawrence, whom Malraux much admired. This man of action is the link with the third section, in which he attends a brilliantly described intellectual discussion which leads to the conclusion that civilisations are not connected; a conclusion disproved by the feelings aroused by the walnut-trees of the title. Berger's father watches, in the fourth section, a gas attack in the first World War, and sees discipline crack and the Germans rescue their gassed Russian enemies. With the last section one is back with Berger, in action as tank commander before his capture. The tank is caught in a trap, escapes, and in the book's splendid ending the tank crew find that the world, the real world of men, is still there for them.

No summary of this book can show its richness, its variations on the theme of the unity of mankind and the basic goodness of the world, or its style, graver than any of the Malraux's previous novels.

Politics and Art

Since then Malraux has written no novels, but has not been idle. He has been active as a political journalist and advocate of a "Liberal Left," having been, for a few months, Minister of Information under De Gaulle, but his chief writings have been a great series on art. This is not such a clean break from novel-writing as it might seem, for Malraux has used his earlier archaeological interests to deal with art from an anthropolo-

gical and historical standpoint and sees art as man's attempt to impose order on a chaotic world; the old self-assertion continues to be a basic theme. This series of works has included so far *La Psychologie de L'Art* (*The Psychology of Art*) and its much-revised version *Les Voix du Silence* (*The Voices of Silence*), followed by works as yet untranslated, such as the *Imaginary Museum of World Sculpture*.

Malraux has his shortcomings. Women play little part in his novels and there is little humour—the nearest approach is perhaps the oddity of Clappique in *La Condition Humaine*, or the rather sad irony of parts of *Les Noyers*. A tendency to admire authoritarianism and the magic of the leader (Malraux is himself a spell-binding orator), is deservedly suspect, but Malraux compensates for this by his unceasing advocacy of the value of the individual, even to the extent of excluding all values except human ones. Some of the interest of his books indeed arises from the clash between the author's personal sympathy with the individual in a tough spot, often an aristocrat, and his political ties with the mass of ordinary people.

This is only one contemporary problem with which Malraux's work deals and which his own career exemplifies; a recurrent feeling when reading him is that here is one of us, a writer who has lived it out himself, and who, unlike some who became famous as dealers in "social significance" in the thirties, has grown with subsequent events. His work is a unity; the distinction between fiction and the rest need hardly concern anyone, except librarians. W. M. Frohock, in *André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination*, has said that, better than any other writer, Malraux has realized that "eternity includes the twentieth century." It is a sweeping statement, but one with which no open-minded reader of Malraux's books is likely entirely to disagree.

Librarians of To-morrow

are welcome at



To-day

to inspect the wide range of new
books on all subjects

HARRODS LTD

SLOane 1234

LONDON SW1

Success Story

Crocodiles and Tom-toms form the Background to a New Pamphlet, "The Development of Public Library Services in the Gold Coast," by Evelyn Evans. Our review is by:

Roy Flood

Our professional journals are so full of high-minded articles which too often are a mixture of vapid platitudes and carping criticism, that it is a pleasure to read a modest account of an outstanding achievement by someone who was not afraid to do a good, honest job of work.

Here is librarianship with a purpose indeed, and many who read this pamphlet* will wonder how much of the success of the project was due to professional skill in planning and inspiring the creation of a library service, and how much to the existence of a progressive and relatively wealthy Colonial Government. I think that it was a fortunate combination of the two, but the original inspiration and driving force was the librarian. That is why librarianship is a profession and not merely a means of earning a living. Neither the intellectual snob who prattles of learning and breadth of background and sneers at techniques, nor the unimaginative clod who puts techniques above all else and makes a philosophy of classification and a religion of mechanised churning, has realised a fraction of the purpose of librarianship.

The story behind this pamphlet is that of a young woman who went to the Gold Coast as the British Council's librarian shortly after an eminent authority had reported on the library situation in West Africa: "For some time to come any general and widespread development of libraries, whether by the British Council or by Governments, is out of the question." Someone who was in the Gold Coast at that time told me that his first impression of her was of "a shy retiring person who wouldn't say boo to a goose." Yet within a few years she had persuaded the Government to agree to finance a plan for library development and within five years of the acceptance of the plan, had built up an efficient library system in an underdeveloped territory, which covers an area as large as Great Britain, Belgium and Holland together. The stimulation and encouragement that the pamphlet should give to those of us who feel that we ought to do more to improve our own library services, lies in the picture it presents of this combination of professional skill and enthusiasm in overcoming problems which, dare I say it, are far greater than we are likely to face in this country.

Beat the Drums.

You will not find the full story in this pamphlet and the one serious criticism is that it is too brief and matter of fact. The background is outlined in a few paragraphs; the stages in the planning and development are clearly set out; but the author is so self-effacing that she nearly succeeds in being dull. At times this might be a textbook account of county library development in England; only sentences such as "Ferries had to be negotiated, tropical storms and fallen trees coped with," or "The vans go out on trek for periods varying between four days and three weeks so that trekking equipment has to be stored inside the vehicle," give a clue to the real circumstances. In fact, I found myself looking for some echo in the pamphlet of the more revealing and personal reports which Eve Evans used to send in when she was British Council librarian. They were vivid accounts of long treks with the lorry and trailer which carried a combined mobile library and cinema. "We called on the Paramount Chief, who agreed to have the drums beaten to call the people together

for a film show." She illustrated them with photographs, and I remember one which showed a lonely figure of a librarian standing on the bank of a very wide river waiting for an antiquated ferry boat—the next photograph in the sequence was of an enormous crocodile! One must be careful not to over-dramatise the pioneering work which librarians are doing in the underdeveloped areas of the world, but at the same time, to be too matter of fact is as serious a fault. In many of these countries the library service is a dynamic factor in the progress of the people because a librarian has possessed the personality, determination and ability to create a service at a time when it was most needed and the need was least appreciated.

*Published by the Library Association at 5s. 0d. (3s. 6d. to members).

Is Your Display Slipping?

A.A.L. Weekend School on

DISPLAY IN THE LIBRARY

October 27 and 28

The A.A.L. is holding a two-day school on display at North Finchley Library, Ravensdale Avenue, London, N.12, from Saturday afternoon, October 27th, until Sunday evening, October 28th. The programme will include an address by an "outside" expert on display, an "Any Questions" session, practical demonstrations in the library itself, and, we hope, plenty of discussion and argument.

The school is being organised by the Greater London Division, some of whose members will be pleased to offer accommodation to provincial members.

Attendance fee 5s. (3s. 6d. for one day).

Enquiries and applications to J. W. Lendon, County Library, Brookhill Road, East Barnet, Herts.

If you're poor at display, come and learn how! If you're good at it, come along and pass on your ideas to those who aren't!

NOTICE OF ELECTION

Nominations are invited for the following Officers and Councillors of the Association for the year 1957:

Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Editor.

Nine nationally elected Councillors, three of whom must be under thirty years of age on 1st January, 1957.

A member under the age of thirty may stand for election as national councillor in either category, but if he/she wishes to stand as an "under-thirty" candidate this should be stated specifically, together with the age of the nominee as at 1st January, 1957.

Nominations must be made in writing by two or more members of the Association, countersigned by the nominee, and reach me not later than 15th October, 1956.

E. E. MOON, *Honorary Secretary.*

Central Library,
Kensington High Street,
London, W.8.

(Sub)sistance to Readers

Roy Marston

Readers' Adviser, Luton Public Library

If one slips the lid off a sailor—one knows what to expect:—A bottle of rum, Eartha Kitt, and unlimited twist. What if a similar process be repeated on the young librarian of to-day? A bottle of developer, a photocharger, and unlimited film? Very likely. It is not a new cry by any means, but more and more the frills are piled on, and farther and farther recedes the basic librarianship. In the professional press, exam. rooms, and meetings, we juggle with foot candles, economic areas, and binding adhesives that stretch to infinity but never break. (An application of this last to all new juniors will soon be standard practice in all progressive authorities). True the candle flickers in these august pages on book selection once in a while, if one can call the wheezy obbligato "Pro and Con Light Fiction" performed by some of the bright young men as a saver at election times, a discussion of such. But what of assistance to readers? Hardly a murmur, unless someone needing the odd sentence to round off the speech says what a good thing it is. And that is the end of it in 90 per cent. of the public libraries in Great Britain. Advice to readers is placed in order of priority somewhere behind microcarding the Westerns.

Nevertheless a favourable event has recently occurred in the issue of the second edition of a book which removes "but I don't know how" re advice to readers, from the repertoire of excuses of our lethargic colleagues. I am referring to R. L. Collison's *Library Assistance to Readers*, Crosby Lockwood, 13s. 6d., 1956. It is ideal meat for the student, always to the point, short and readable; a contrast to some of the weighty tomes one must digest. Possibly enough consideration has not been given to the special library of view, but to the public librarian it is a boon, easily the best in its field. Other criticisms depend on one's personal standpoint, for differing libraries, differing clienteles, condition advisory work.



Mr. Collison believes in signs in a big way, thus hoping to put the Indian variety on the public at large. He would have ample directions from main thoroughfares to the library, where it is (as in most cases) away from the hub. One cannot but agree, for who has not experienced difficulty in finding a colleague's workplace in a strange town? Within the building itself however his advice as to notices seems somewhat lavish. One would think that rather than multifarious signs in

the entrance hall as to hours of opening, departments, etc., a uniformed attendant is preferable. He can guide the lost sheep, ensure good order, and if smart create a favourable impression on the newcomer. It is a good tenet of display that if you want to get things over, say as little as possible, and stick to the minimum of differing points. Mr. Collison advocates plans of the lending library on stack ends, in addition to guides to the subjects in the stack, tier guides and shelf guides. This seems to be overdoing things, and, if the work is not tasteful, makes the stacks reminiscent of the sides of a 'bus. A better approach, I feel, is one large plan only to the lending library near its entrance, stack and tier guides in plastic lettering, and an adequate personal advice service, thus providing the essential backing to catalogues and classification. Recommendations given in this book as to reference library guiding could not be improved on as might be expected.

Displays.

Regarding displays, Mr. Collison emphasises that if they are not of a high standard they may do more harm than good. He stresses the importance of topicality, and the danger in shewing bookjackets; i.e. concentration of demand on a few books entailing long waiting lists and irritated readers. One might add concerning standards of production that if no one has the gift for display work it is money well spent to put the work out to professionals, or liaise with the local school of art, if practicable.

Printed and other aids to reference and lending advice are listed, and their scope described briefly where necessary. This is the author's strongest point, and to attempt to fault him is futile.

Library publications are always a source of controversy. Print is expensive, duplicating, however well done, second-rate. What should the library provide? Again diverse circumstances, diverse answers. One must experiment and see what takes on. Mr. Gardner has tried a variety of general bulletins, booklists, etc., at Luton, some including features, some not, some priced, others free, and has finally alighted on the fortnightly bookmark listing with annotations thirty titles, which is distributed gratis. People come to the library to read, but not necessarily to indulge the literary aspirations of the staff. "Round the borough," "Did you know," are no doubt well intentioned, but the public wants to be informed about books, either recent publications in general or works on their subject of interest. Thus it is suggested that if the printing vote is to give full value books and their annotations take priority, and are not relegated to the back page. Mr. Collison endorses this line of approach, but also devotes considerable space to the library handbook; i.e. a description of resources, services, rules and regulations, well produced. It is my view that this is the type of publication that "sticks," suffering quick conversion to paper hats by borrowers' children; the necessities are best incorporated on the labels of books.

Publicity.

The section on publicity mentions all the important ways of attracting attention to the library. Lists of additions to the local Press, house organs, and other journals; checking of directories to see that the library is clearly indicated; news notes to the Press; stands at exhibitions; displays in shops; talks to societies, and so on. One would stress only one point, i.e. relations with the Press. If the librarian is on good terms with the editor of the local paper invaluable publicity results; the local service being brought to the public's notice at every opportunity.

Readers' advisory service is given a section in this book, the scope of an adviser's duties outlined, and the interest of the job underlined. I

must quarrel with the author on one point here, however. He suggests that the job should not be held by one person for over twelve months, as it offers scope for originality and individuality, and is thus capable of providing valuable experience for many members of the staff. Now earlier on Mr. Collison has stated that our trouble is that we look at things as librarians, and not with the eyes of the public, a fault we must eradicate in our assistance. Unfortunately over this question of an adviser's tenure of office he has fallen victim himself. Admitted that from the librarian's point of view there is a strong case for sharing the job around. But what of the advantages of continuity? Surely the public are better served by the adviser who has been in office for a considerable period, knows his stock thoroughly, is well acquainted with the district, and most important, is aware of readers' individual needs. On work with children the author is very sound, acknowledging his debt to the methods used at Sheffield. He deals fully with visits to the library during the last year at school, and their value in making the child conversant with the help that the service can give him in future life. One cannot help feeling that work such as this is worth ten times the film shows and puppets by which ingenious children's librarians attempt to lure the young and uninitiated into their clutches!

In conclusion, I can only reiterate previous comment. For the student this book is valuable, for the custodian who would wish to progress to librarian, indispensable.

The illustration is by George Harris from Stanley Holliday's READER AND THE BOOKISH MANNER, published by the A.A.L. at 2s. 9d.

Hooting and Honking

HOWARD S. HOPTROUGH

Cumberland County Library

Many people living in rural communities in Great Britain must now be familiar with the periodic appearance of the travelling library in the village square or at the farm gate; but how many of the library profession have an inkling of the operation of such a travelling library and, worse still, how many travelling librarians know anything of any travelling libraries other than their own?

In the years since the end of the war travelling libraries have multiplied at a great rate, but notice of them in professional print has consisted almost entirely of the description of new vehicles being put into service. Hardly anything has appeared in print concerning the technique of the operation of travelling libraries, or concerning the problems peculiar to them. Considering that this method of library service is now almost universally accepted, the lack of material seems to be of some importance.

How many of these libraries, for instance, operate with a librarian and driver/assistant, and how many with only a driver/librarian? Does the economy of the latter lessen the efficiency of the service provided? What form of issue system is used? How many books are borrowers allowed at one time, and is this affected by the length of the interval between the library's visits? What kinds of vehicles are best suited to what kinds of terrain, and how far should their capacity be governed by this factor and by that of the kind and size of community served? When is the service made available; is an evening service, for instance, justified, and, if so, under what circumstances?

Then there are the perennial problems common to libraries of all kinds, but which for travelling libraries have their own peculiar aspect. The type of book-stock provided, the inevitable rules and regulations (these, it may be noted, have often to be liberally interpreted in the atmosphere of closer contact between the librarian and reader engendered by the travelling library), the request service, renewals, fines and many other seemingly trivial matters, which all, however, add up to either an efficient or a not-so-efficient service.

Lastly, there are the statistics—or rather, there are the lack of them. Admittedly, one has to beware of the prevalent twentieth century attitude of worship at the shrine of statistics, but, properly used, they can form the basis of an assessment of any problem. So far as I know, no one is aware of the exact total of travelling libraries operating in this country. This may well be because the definition of what is a travelling library has not yet been finally decided, or it may simply be because records from which a total may be computed do not exist. As for any other statistics (apart from yearly issue figures in annual reports, usually lumped together under the heading: “travelling library service”), I know of none.

Librarians often assemble in small groups to discuss the “ins” and “outs,” and the “ifs” and “buts,” of their profession, but travelling librarians, from the nature of their duties, are precluded from attending such gatherings. Their only means of contact is by the printed or written word. Travelling librarians tend to pass on to other positions in the profession more quickly than do—may I say it—static librarians. A collection of printed material and statistics to which newly-appointed travelling librarians could refer would be of inestimable value, and would perhaps be of assistance to chief librarians wishing to improve their travelling library service.

Let's hear from the travelling librarians; a honk or a hoot would be something of a change from the click of a wicket or the rustle of a ticket!

ESTABLISHED 1868

J. STARR & SONS, LTD.

Specialist Library Bookbinders

**Dawber Street Works
Wigan, Lanes.**

'Phone : 2 Lines
3484-5

'Grams : Starrs 3484
Wigan

One Quality only — The Best

Librarians into Film Stars

*The story of Sheffield's library film told by the Deputy Librarian and
A.A.L. National Councillor*

W. Howard Phillips

1956 marks the centenary of the opening of the first public Library in Sheffield. The main celebrations included the opening of a new Branch Library, a number of special publications and a library exhibition. A more original venture was the making of a Centenary Film.

The idea was first mooted some time during 1954, when a committee of five senior members of the staff was asked to consider the possibilities. They had one thing in common—they knew nothing about films! They were thus able to approach their task with clear and innocent minds and at once decided it would be no disadvantage to view, with critical interest, such library films as already existed. The A.A.L. film *Index to Progress*, and an early copy of its rather disappointing successor *Resources Discovered* were studied with particular care. Of the other films, it is kinder to say nothing. There was an American film, for example, which lacking craft, yet strove strenuously for art—it had an almost pathological pre-occupation with people's feet!

Next, the Committee consulted various amateur and industrial film makers in the city, from whom they received much enlightenment but little encouragement. (A film about libraries? . . . Oh Lord! For a few hundred pounds . . . You'll never do it!) And, of course, books were read and vocabularies augmented—panning, tracking, fade, dissolve, dub, cut, montage and like jargon even now confound any discussion over morning coffee.

Photogenic Females

Out of these efforts the general idea of the film emerged—a 16 m.m. documentary, of about 20 minutes' duration, which would illustrate all the main services provided in the City Libraries and some of the important back-room work, if possible in colour to give the camera greater scope and to offset any lack of action. At the same time, it became only too clear that there are few kinds of activity which absorb money more readily than the making of films, and that the only obvious solution was to persuade some enthusiastic local amateur or ciné club to make the film for no reward but the possible honour and glory. Reluctantly this idea was abandoned. The activities of a public library, and even the photogenic charms of the Sheffield female staff, were insufficient to tempt amateurs away from their favourite themes. However, much excellent advice was freely offered and gratefully accepted.

It was now evident that, if the film was to be made at all, it would have to be made professionally. There are a number of companies specialising in documentaries, all producing excellent films and offering every facility from the drafting of the script to the final processing—but not for the amount we had to offer. At this time, however, a local photographic firm was co-operating in the production of short cartoon films, based on "home-made" drawings. These films, cheap and unpretentious, were being used experimentally in place of lantern slides in advertising the library service at the Cinema Shows held during the winter months in the Central Library Theatre. The firm concerned in this modest enterprise, Messrs. Photo Finishers (Sheffield) Ltd., offered to co-operate with the City Libraries to produce the centenary film, with the sole proviso that a professional script should be commissioned—the venture to be largely experimental with the cost estimated in our favour.

Script Technique

It is interesting to note how the script writer solved the problem of keeping the film to a reasonable length, while at the same time giving it variety and some kind of artistic shape, so that it was not merely a long and solemn progression from one department to another. Briefly, he moves fairly rapidly from scene to scene, cutting from a public department to an administration department, from an exterior to an interior, using the commentary to provide the necessary links to hold the film together. Considered at leisure, the continuity may seem illogical, but the resultant variety and rhythm and sense of the unexpected succeeds in sustaining the interest.

The film begins and ends in Hillsborough Park, within sight of a branch library, with five people sitting on a bench reading. The books they hold are, of course, from the City Libraries, and the incongruity of their tastes and their contrasting styles of reading, candidly recorded by the camera, provide a light-hearted opening sequence. For these scenes we engaged three actors from the Sheffield Repertory Theatre. All the other players were either members of the staff or readers (in confidence, the former sometimes appear disguised as the latter!). The members of the staff who staked a modest claim to remembrance before the camera look back upon their efforts with mixed feelings. To some the camera was flattering, and they will hardly be recognised. To others, alas, the camera was only too impartial . . .

For almost every scene, properties had to be assembled and "actors" rehearsed. Camera angles had to be worked out, the intensity of the lighting tested, fathoms of cable laid, black-out curtains fixed, furniture shifted, books arranged and re-arranged, and blown fuses investigated. Members of the staff had to be pressed into service as actors, drilled in rehearsal, grilled in performance, and dismissed to their normal duties half-dazed, half-blinded and choleric in complexion from the heat of the lamps. In the midst of all these chaotic activities, came there but a glimmer of sunshine, and the camera unit was off to secure the "location" shots. It is astonishing that with all the inevitable delays and frustrations inseparable from work of this kind, the shooting was completed so quickly.

Cutting and Commentating

To obtain the best results in film-making, it is common sense and common practice to shoot more film than will be ultimately required, and so it was with *Books in Hand*. About 1,300 feet were exposed and, after final editing, some 700 feet remained. This wastage is well within the accepted limits. The editing was done from a black-and-white copy. When the final cuts had been made, the commentary was pruned, to achieve the necessary split-second timing with the edited film and recorded by Alvar Lidell of B.B.C. fame.

Without being obtrusively clever, the cameraman made intelligent use of lighting, camera angles, and the familiar techniques of fading, dissolving and montage. The potential horrors of film music have been avoided. A few cheerful bars lead in the first scene and fade out the last; for the rest, not a note, either in or out of tune.

Members of the A.A.L., curious to see the film, will be glad to know that copies are available to organisers of meetings, providing that they have the use of a first class 16 m.m. sound projector and the services of an efficient operator. Requests should be made, in writing, to the City Librarian, Central Library, Sheffield.

Your Letters

—Book selection—Mr. Moon's language—Eng. Lit.

Morals of Book Selection

At a recent trial in France a lawyer put the responsibility for the crime on the reading of certain modern authors (notably Gide and Sartre).

The library profession has concerned itself with the physical and bibliographical aspects of book selection. Lately, it has ventilated the question of sub-literature. But it has signally failed to explore the moral aspects of book selection.

This results in the display on open shelves of works of all moral levels, thus exposing the simple-minded unwary reader to the continuous danger of moral infection. The purposive student of literature is, of course, able to discriminate in his choice of reading, and any material that he might require should be available on special application.

Librarians must consider the moral effects of reading and evolve some clear working principles to apply both in book selection and in assistance to readers. Then libraries will take an active and constructive role in relation to the individual and society. As a beginning to this work, we could examine the practice obtaining in Ireland, where there is stricter selection and a marked absence of crime.

We should do well to heed the warning given to Freemen of the City of London: "But beware of all such books as are licentious or profane: these may well be compared to palatable poison; there may be wit in them, but if you read them they will insensibly corrupt both your morals and principles."

ALAN THOMAS, *Lewisham Public Libraries.*

What the Hell!

Surely it is in very bad taste for Mr. Moon to call *The Chance To Read* "a damned good book." I have not yet had an opportunity to read this book, but I have no reason to believe that it is infernal in any way.

The use of a swear word where an ordinary adjective could be employed seems to betray a poverty of vocabulary. It is small wonder that many people have difficulty in accepting us as professional workers if we are unable to express ourselves in our official journal without resorting to exclamations of this kind.

JENNIFER SOLOMON, *Kent County Library.*

If his review of *A Chance to Read* in your August issue is an example of Mr. Moon's efforts to woo the masses, I beg him to forbear before he commits further outrages upon the English language. Are assistant librarians so apathetic, so intellectually handicapped that they cannot follow a few paragraphs of clear English prose of serious content? I am insulted that Mr. Moon thinks us worthy only of his profusion and confusion of parentheses, his lyrical crackling, whatever that may be and his generally ejaculative style. The unkindest cut of all, however, is to be informed that the volume is "a damned good book." I suspect that Mr. Moon considers this expression an example of vigorous illuminating writing, but I confess that the only thing it illumines for me is the uncertain ability of the reviewer.

No one objects to true wit in the right context. I merely object to Mr. Moon's apparent *penchant* for slack journalese which I feel is unworthy of his intentions.

BRENDA WALKER, *Manchester Reference Library.*

Insult to Students

In our last issue Senior Examiner K.C. Harrison replied to criticisms of the Registration English Literature Examination.

Mr. Harrison's third paragraph constitutes a far more damaging "indictment" both of syllabus and examiners than I, or anyone else, could have devised. This examination then must be a question of authors and titles, descriptive rather than critical information is required, and the student who has not actually read his Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth will not find himself penalized. In other words, the examination is to be reduced to the dreary level of a parrot-like recitation of authors, dates and titles. This is an insult to the intelligence of Registration students who, even in the School Certificate or G.C.E., have been credited with the possession of some critical ability.

If this is the only justification for the retention of the English Literature paper, it might just as well be thrown out after the equally redundant essay in the old Entrance examination. I notice that Mr. Harrison attempts no reply to my criticisms in the *May Assistant*. His silence can only be interpreted as tacit admission of the indefensibility of the paper in question.

D. S. REED.

Although I am sure that Mr. Harrison is right in imputing to the syllabus some part of the responsibility for the way the Registration English Literature papers are set, I don't think that quite *all* of the notable features of the Modern Period examination this summer can be written off in that way. Perhaps the examination would be "a travesty" as soon as people could predict what authors would appear, but equally it seems certain that the examinations will be in danger of being a travesty if the examiners consider that the writings of Tom Moore, Leigh Hunt and Robert Lynd should be offered as the major works of major authors.

Surely questions could be set always on some of the first-line writers in the period—Wordsworth, if not Coleridge; Keats if not Shelley; and so on. Any gaps could then be filled with *good* minor writers; writers of the status of, say, Crabbe, Disraeli, or Clough. With Moore, Hunt and Lynd we are not merely among writers more completely minor than those Mrs. Cooper mentions, we are down among the dead men.

It is, however, in the actual phrasing of the questions that I see the worst features of this Summer's paper. This must surely have depressed anyone coming to the examination believing that literature is composed mainly of meaningful and expressive sentences.

In question 8, we are told that Butler was called "Shaw's precursor" and asked to review his works "in the light of this evaluation." Not by any stretch of meaning can the phrase "Shaw's precursor" be called an "evaluation." There is similar uncertainty of meaning about the wording of questions 1, 3 and 6 where the candidate is asked, successively, to "define," "describe," and "demonstrate" the "characteristics" of various things. I wonder whether the examiners seriously intended there to be a difference of approach in each of these questions. Would one, for example, get any marks for Question 1 where one is asked to "define the characteristics" of Coleridge's prose if, having decided that the characteristics were, say, "vigour" and "obscurity," one spent the half-hour defining "vigour" and "obscurity"?

Again, what can "literary achievements" (Question 2) and "literary significance" (Question 5) mean—especially if, as Mr. Harrison says, critical comments are not called for? Finally, what is "the Romantic novel, 1814-1832", whose "principle characteristics" the bewildered examinee has to "describe"? Does it exist outside some history of Eng. Lit.?

G. D. E. SOAR, *University of London Library.*

A. M. HALDANE

LTD.



**WE SPECIALISE IN
CHILDREN'S BOOKS**



B.N.B. ORDERS



SPECIAL REQUESTS



PROMPT SERVICE
especially in the London
Area



**5, DENMARK STREET,
CHARING CROSS ROAD,
W.C.2**

COVent Garden 0488

**A Modern
Library Bindery**

THIS fully illustrated brochure, describing our methods of dealing on a large scale with library binding throughout all the different processes, has long been used by library assistants as a textbook. It is available to library assistants on receipt of a postal order for 1s. 3d.

B. RILEY & CO. LTD.

**LIBRARY BINDERS AND
BOOKSELLERS**

**366 LEEDS ROAD
HUDDERSFIELD**

**H. KARNAC
(BOOKS) LTD.**

**58, GLOUCESTER RD.,
LONDON, S.W.7.
WESTERN 7908.**

*New and Secondhand Books on
all subjects.*

An A.A.L. Publication

**Introduction to
COUNTY LIBRARY
PRACTICE**

by William Caldwell

3s. 9d. to members

from J. S. Davey,
49, Halstead Gardens, London,
N.21.

